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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to investigate the relationship of fiction reading to adult development. Eighty students at an adult education center completed questionnaires that elicited information concerning their reading of fiction and their adult experiences, as well as demographic information. The results yielded a picture of a group of adult readers whose lives were marked by rapid social and personal change and who were able to assimilate the experience of transition in part through the aesthetic transaction with fiction. The findings suggested that fiction reading did enhance growth and development of the particular group of readers. (FL)

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THE RELATIONSHIP OF FICTION-READING TO ADULT DEVELOPMENT

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THE RELATIONSHIP OF FICTION-READING TO ADULT DEVELOPMENT

PURPOSE

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship of fiction-reading to adult development. At the core of the study is the construction of a taxonomy of developmental themes which emerged when adult readers described the impact of fiction on perception, attitude, or behavior. A principal concern was to distinguish parallels between the reader-text transaction and the mentorship experience which nurtures adult growth.

DESIGN OF THE STUDY

The genesis of the study derived from the researcher's experience with literature students at an urban adult education center. The students as a group, highly motivated and responsive to challenging and time-consuming assignments in the work of such authors as James Joyce and Virginia Woolf, were evidently concerned with literature as aesthetic experience. Yet there were indications that their commitment to fiction-reading had something of an element of quest, that they were searching for meaning directly relevant to their experience as adults.

That these were individuals whose lives seemed marked by

transition gave rise to the question of whether their experience of literature was related to their adaptations to change both cultural and personal, ultimately to growth and development. The new awareness of the demands of developmental growth prompted an inquiry into the impact that developmental preoccupations and concerns have on the response of the adult reader to the text.

Literary theorists (e.g., Bleich, 1975, 1978; Fish, 1972; Holland, 1975; Rosenblatt, 1938, 1978) have tended to move beyond the exclusive focus of the New Critics on the text. Their attention to the subjective response of the reader and its role in the reader-text transaction (Rosenblatt, 1938, 1978),and their recognition that the reader's response is based on personal needs and concerns, prepared the way for the present investigation and its employment of the findings of adult development research.

The adult development researchers (e.g., Erikson, 1978; Levinson, 1978; Vaillant, 1978) have established that adulthood is characterized by a dynamic evolution of life structures. While each individual proceeds through stages in a unique way, there is a basic pattern that underlies the processes of adulthood, each phase of which is characterized by particular tasks.

Levinson's description of mentoring relationships in adult development (1978) provided a conceptual link for this study between the findings on growth and transition in the lives of adults and the theories of the response of readers to texts. In his recent work he describes some of the

various mentoring roles: teacher sponsor, host and guide, exemplar, and counselor. The mentor, as a transitional figure, helps to shape one's ideal of the self in the world or what Levinson terms the Dream.

The ways in which students were relating to fiction-reading suggested that they might be engaged in symbolic mentoring relationships. The assumption underlying the present study was that the insights derived from research on adult development and particularly on the mentorship role in adult development could serve as a useful guide to an analysis of the response of these adult readers to fiction.

The study undertaken was exploratory in nature and did not seek to check out explicitly formulated hypotheses. Rather the strategy was to accumulate data which would reveal themes and patterns of significance in the study of the response of readers as it relates to adult development.

Subjects

In the spring of 1979, this researcher selected potential subjects from personal records as an instructor at a privately endowed nonprofit center for adult education, where courses are offered during four semesters a year. Class size varies at the

center from approximately seven to twenty adult students.

Each of the students invited to participate was known by the researcher to have completed at least one full course in literature with this instructor within the five years previous to the study. Of those who agreed to participate, 80 students, 20 men and 60 women, completed questionnaires. Because they were, for the most part, university educated, and therefore, in a sense, a select population of readers, a profile of the subjects is outlined below to distinguish this group from others who might be surveyed.

The Questionnaire

A research methodology was employed which was both quantitative and qualitative. The purpose of the questionnaire was shared with participants: to elicit responses regarding their reading of fiction, as well as enough information about their adult experience to establish a context in which to examine the role of fiction-reading for them.

The instrument, developed by the researcher, incorporates questions on the background of the students: their residence, education, career, marital and family situation, and leisure activities. Some questions focused on the pattern of fiction-reading and its distinctive features, whether, for example, students read specialty fiction such as science fiction or mysteries.

Open-ended questions were intended as prods, separately and cumulatively encouraging students to offer narrative descriptions of the impact of fiction on experience. Two of these core questions were:

> Describe an experience of fiction-reading which challenged your attitudes, perceptions or values in a significant way.
>
> Describe an experience of fiction-reading which made you feel that an attitude or experience of your own was something shared by others.

There was no direction to particular themes; rather the questionnaire was designed to permit such themes to emerge in a pattern of frequency that reflected the group's preoccupations and concerns.

Participants were encouraged to be explicit about both the fiction; e.g., character and incident, and their experience, e.g., person and situation. It was suggested that they discuss works read in the last several years, ideally but not necessarily in the courses the researcher had shared with them. Such a suggestion imposed some constraints but was offered as a guideline rather than as a requirement. It had the advantage of narrowing, to a limited extent the rather broad focus on fiction in the study, while permitting each student latitude for the selection of fiction to be discussed.

ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

Profile of the Sample

The age range of the 80 respondents, 20 men and 60 women, was 21 to 79. Half of the women and more than half of the men were in the 26-35 age range. Only 11 percent of the men and women were 46 and over.

Approximately 90 percent of the group held a minimum of a college degree. At the highest academic level, 25 percent of the women in the sample had a master's degree, while 35 percent of the men had a doctorate or professional degree. Purves and Beach (1972) point out that 20 percent of the readers account for 70 percent of the books read, and education is a strong determinant of that 20 percent.

Several of the questions were designed to probe to what extent respondents had experienced transition in their lives, particularly within the last five years, the period during which they were literature students at the center.

There is evidence in the data of considerable flux, change which demands adjustment and adaptation. Results indicate, for example, that 45 percent of the men and 27 percent of the women had had a change in marital status during that time. Further, 75 percent of the group had experienced a change in an important personal relationship other than marriage. More than two-thirds

of the sample had taken academic courses within the last five years and alsmot half planned further academic study. Approximately two-thirds of the group had had a career change within the last five years and 40 percent were planning a career change.

Information on leisure activities has special relevance in a study of readers. Reading was scored as an important leisure activity by 98 percent of the group. Only 22 percent valued television viewing as a leisure activity, while a greater percentage 35 percent, said writing was an important activity for them. Filmgoing attracted 82 percent of the group. The range of other leisure activities, alluded to by 100 percent of the men and 95 percent of the women, was wide, ranging from playing a musical instrument to backpacking to gourmet cooking.

Reading Patterns

Over 90 percent of the sample said that they read either a good deal or a moderate amount of fiction. Over 80 percent of the group also reported a good deal or a moderate amount of nonfiction or professional reading.

Their pattern of fiction-reading was described by 55 percent as periodic and by 45 percent as consistent. However, more than 70 percent of the group cited periods within the last five years as a time of most fiction-reading. That is a considerable number of participants noticed a rise in fiction-reading during the last while, a time of transition for most of them.

Almost 70 percent of the group did not have a particular interest in specialty fiction such as science fiction and mysteries. Of the total group, 58 percent reported that there are books they once valued which are no longer as important to them.

When authors were named who were important to respondents, almost all the men and more than two-thirds of the women named a same-sex author as important to them.

Coding Procedures

Central to this study of the relationship of fiction-reading to adult development is a set of developmental themes or recurring motifs which emerged when adult readers reported on their transactions with fictional texts.

The orientation for establishing categories after a close examination of the subjects' written responses derived from the material on the developmental tasks facing adults which had been outlined by such researchers as Levinson (1978). His discussion, for example, of the relationship of an individual to his family and the role of that relationship to development prompted an alertness to the appearance of this theme in the protocols and thereby to the formulation of the category, Family of Origin. There was no attempt to adhere to a pre-established schema of themes. The responses were scrutinized for all themes relevant to the issues of adult development and the frequency with which they appeared.

Three broad divisions were employed for grouping the categories:

1. Intrapersonal: themes that reflect the preoccupation with the self
2. Interpersonal: themes concerning the interaction between the self and others
3. Transpersonal: themes that point to concerns of the individual with issues beyond face-to-face relationships

The broad divisions, like the categories, derive in part from the adult development research focus on the self in the world, the self in its full context.

Divisions, categories, and indicants that emerged from the classification procedure are displayed in Table 1.

An effort was made to employ terms for category designation that would be essentially self-explanatory, such as "Marital and Love Relationships" and "Friendship." Analysis focused on manifest content. That is, wherever possible, explicit reference to themes was sought for tabulation. There was no demand, then, to make interpretive decisions regarding, for example, a respondent's sense of guilt for an entry in the category labeled "Guilt." Rather the response was scrutinized for a self-report of the experience of guilt.

A theme was entered once for a respondent whether it appeared only once in his responses or several times. To compensate for this limiation of the numerical data, sample responses were included to illustrate the intensity of particular motifs in the protocols.

TABLE 1

THEMES FOR CONTENT ANALYSIS

Theme	Indicators
I. Intrapersonal	
1. Maleness/Femaleness	1. Gender identity; sex role expectations
2. Personal Disequilibrium	2. Depression; mental instability; suicidal impulses
3. Autonomy	3. Self-direction; independence; strength
4. Separateness	4. Privacy; solitude
5. Creativity/Achievement	5. Accomplishment in career or avocation
6. Emotion	6. Explicit*
7. Guilt	7. Explicit
8. The Inner Self	8. Imagination; the "unconscious"
II: Interpersonal	
9. Family or Origin	9. Parents; siblings
10. Marital and Love Relationships	10. Explicit
11. Motherhood/Fatherhood	11. Parenting experience
12. Contrasting Others	12. Those who differ in cultural or psychological experience
13. Friendship	13. Explicit
III. Transpersonal	
14. Ethnic and Religious Heritage	14. Explicit
15. Conventional Mores and Morals	15. Traditional vs. innovative codes of behavior
16. Life Cycle: Maturing, Aging, Death	16. Age specific concerns
17. Aesthetic Response	17. Attention to form and language of texts; engagement with text
18. Beliefs/Concepts	18. Personal paradigms and constructs; individual philosophies
19. Political/Historical Issues	19. Matters of national and international impact
20. Natural World	20. Appreciation of natural phenomena; ecological concerns

*"Explicit" indicates here that subcategories are not essential for coding.

AS a check on the mutual exclusiveness and consistency of the categories, a group of raters comprised of three doctoral candidates was formed to act as a jury. They helped to determine the appropriateness of terminology used for themes and indicators and to decide whether and to what extent other persons could place an incident in this category system.

All coding was carried out by the researcher. An interrater reliability procedure was utilized to check on objectivity and to validate the categorizing process. Three coders were trained to examine questionnaires for indicators of the established themes. In an independent coding procedure, there was a .90 agreement among raters according to categories. The high percentage of agreement among raters suggests that this category system is useful for research on adult response to literature.

Distribution of Themes

Tables 2 and 3 present the data on the distribution of themes in two formats which display total frequencies for each theme as well as frequencies according to reporter age and sex. After the general pattern of distribution is reviewed here, the results will be considered as they vary with age and sex of respondents.

The theme Maleness/Femaleness was referred to by 71 percent of the respondents, signaling its importance to this group. The other theme cited with similarly high frequency by 70 percent of the group, is Marital and Love Relationships. Response was also high in the category Beliefs and Concepts, 64 percent.

TABLE 2

PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF THEMES GROUPED ACCORDING TO REPORTER AGE

Theme	Ages 21-25 (N=10)	26-36 (N=43)	36-45 (N=18)	46 & Over (N=9)	Total (N=80)
1. Maleness/ Femaleness	80%	81%	50%	56%	71%
2. Personal Disequilibrium	70	58	28	22	49
3. Autonomy	50	49	56	22	48
4. Separateness	30	28	33	11	28
5. Creativity & Achievement	50	33	33	0	31
6. Emotion	50	47	44	56	48
7. Guilt	0	14	11	11	11
8. The Inner Self	10	47	17	33	34
9. Family of Origin	80	58	33	44	54
10. Marital & Love Relationships	40	74	83	56	70
11. Motherhood/ Fatherhood	20	33	56	22	35
12. Contrasting Others	60	44	22	22	39
13. Friendship	30	9	17	0	13
14. Ethnic & Religious Heritage	40	37	28	33	35
15. Conventional Mores & Morals	20	37	33	44	35
16. Life Cycle: Maturing, Aging, Death	40	37	17	44	34
17. Aesthetic Response	50	60	61	56	59
18. Beliefs/Concepts	60	67	56	67	64
19. Political/Historical Issues	30	37	28	22	32
20. Natural World	10	19	11	11	15

TABLE 2.3

PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF THEMES GROUPED ACCORDING TO REPORTER AGE AND SEX BY DIVISION

Intrapersonal

Theme	21-25		26-36		36-45		46 & Over		Total	
	Male (N=3)	Female (N=7)	Male (N=10)	Female (N=33)	Male (N=4)	Female (N=14)	Male (N=3)	Female (N=6)	Male (N=20)	Female (N=60)
1. Maleness/ Femaleness	67%	86%	30%	97%	25%	57%	0%	83%	30%	85%
2. Personal Disequilibrium	67	71	50	61	25	29	33	83	45	50
3. Autonomy	0	71	0	63	0	71	0	33	0	63
4. Separateness	0	43	10	33	0	43	33	0	10	33
5. Creativity & Achievement	33	57	10	39	75	21	0	0	25	33
6. Emotion	67	43	50	46	25	50	67	50	50	47
7. Guilt	0	0	10	15	25	7	33	0	15	10
8. The Inner Self	0	14	40	48	25	14	33	33	30	33

(continued on next page)

TABLE 3 (continued)

Interpersonal

Theme	21-25 Male (N=3)	21-25 Female (N=7)	26-36 Male (N=10)	26-36 Female (N=33)	36-45 Male (N=4)	36-45 Female (N=14)	46 & Over Male (N=3)	46 & Over Female (N=6)	Total Male (N=20)	Total Female (N=60)
9. Family of Origin	67%	85%	60%	58%	25%	36%	67%	33%	55%	53%
10. Marital & Love Relationships	67	29	60	79	100	79	33	67	65	72
11. Motherhood/ Fatherhood	33	14	0	42	50	57	0	33	15	42
12. Contrasting Others	67	57	50	42	0	29	0	33	35	40
13. Friendship	0	43	0	12	0	21	0	0	0	17
Transpersonal										
14. Ethnic & Religious Heritage	100	14	20	42	50	21	33	33	40	33
15. Conventional Mores & Morals	0	29	30	39	0	43	33	50	20	40
16. Life Cycle: Maturing, Aging, Death	33	43	40	36	25	14	33	50	35	33
17. Aesthetic Response	67	43	60	61	75	57	33	67	60	58
18. Beliefs/Concepts	100	43	80	64	75	50	100	50	85	57
19. Political/Historical issues	33	29	40	36	25	29	0	33	30	33
20. Natural World	33	0	40	12	25	7	0	17	30	10

100

Further indication of the nature of the reading experience of this sample emerged in the references to Aesthetic Response, a theme cited by 59 percent of the participants. The protocols are marked by references to form and language, to what one student describes as "the impact of words against one another, the firmness of good prose."

Four of the categories were each cited by approximately half of the respondents: Personal Disequilibrium, Autonomy, Emotion, and Family of Origin. The theme of Contrasting Others recurred at a 39 percent frequency.

The remaining themes were each mentioned by one-third or fewer of the participants.

The Age Variable

Table 2 reports the distribution of themes in terms of totals for each age group, and Table 3 displays frequencies of response for men and women within each age group.

A strikingly high 80 percent of those between 21 and 15, and 81 percent of those 26 to 35, referred to the theme Maleness/Femaleness. Half of the respondents between 36 and 45, and more than half of those 46 and over, made reference to this salient theme as well. Levinson (1978) says that the Masculine/Feminine polarity was of great importance to all those in his study.

Levinson's work is particularly recalled by the high frequency of reference to the theme Family of Origin by those between 21 and 25. The figure falls to a still high 58 percent for those

in the two later age categories. Levinson sees separating from family of origin as a major task of the early adult years. Further, he points out that there is often considerable difference between the style of life of young adults and the style of life they were involved in when they were in a pre-adult phase.

References to the theme Contrasting Others was highest for those in the 21 to 25 age group, 60 percent, and dropped for those in the three later age groups.

The concern with Personal Disequilibrium is evident in reference to the theme by 70 percent of those between 21 and 25 and 58 percent of those 26 to 35. Frequencies for this theme drop sharply for this category for the two later age groups.

The recurrence of reference to Marital and Love Relationships is 40 percent for those 21 to 25 and 56 percent for those 46 and over. Frequency rises to 74 percent for those 26 to 35, ages within what Levinson calls the Novice Phase when forming love relationships is a central task, and peaks at 83 percent for those in the 36 to 45 age group.

The majority of the responses contributed to any one category by those 46 and over, 67 percent, was contributed to Beliefs/Concepts. Both Beliefs/Concepts and Aesthetic Response were each referred to by half to two-thirds of each of the age groups. About half of each group referred to Autonomy.

Worth noting is that while 50 percent of those in the 21 to 25 age group referred to Creativity and Achievement, none in the 46 and over group cited this theme. Similarly, 30 percent of those in the youngest group referred to Friendship, while none in the oldest group made specific reference to it.

The Sex Variable

When results are examined in terms of the sex variable, some striking contrasts emerge. For example, while male students omitted mention of Autonomy, there is a 63 percent frequency of reference to the theme by female students. Further, the protocols of the female respondents reveal an intense preoccupation with the issue of self-direction. A student writes that author Mary Gordon (1979) enabled her to recognize that:

> .....women have a way of turning over responsibility for their inner lives to men...who compel them. Trying to fight my way out of that particular paper bag, I realized with this book what I'd done to myself and suddenly my actions and reactions seemed reasonable and ordinary rather than bizarre and shameful.

The motif, Maleness/Femaleness, which is comprised of those issues specific to gender identity, was the theme that received most frequent reference from female respondents, 85 percent. It was mentioned by only 30 percent of the male respondents.

The theme Motherhood/Fatherhood, which was mentioned by 42 percent of the women and only 15 percent of the men, and that of Separateness, mentioned by 33 percent of the women and only 10 percent of the men, can also be related to sex role.

Concern with rapid change in sex role expectation is reflected in the higher frequency of reference by women to the them of Conventional Mores and Morals. Response for this theme was 40 percent for women and 20 percent for men.

The greatest number of contributions to a theme made by male students was to Beliefs/Concepts, which was referred to by 85 percent of the men and 57 percent of the women.

Both men and women frequently mentioned Love and Marital Relationships: 65 percent of the men and 72 percent of the women. Many of the total group discussed their reading experience in terms of Aesthetic Response, 60 percent of the men and 58 percent of the women. Approximately half of the men and half of the women made reference to Personal Disequilibriu,, Emotion, and Family of Origin.

Distribution of Responses Within Divisions

Table 4 summarizes the frequencies of themes within divisions. About a quarter of the total responses cited themes that are Interpersonal, while about a third referred to themes that are Transpersonal. The highest number of responses, 40 percent, were to themes that are Intrapersonal.

Most of the men's responses treated themes that are Transpersonal, 45 percent, and most of the women's responses, 42 percent, dealt with themes that are Intrapersonal.

TABLE 4

PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONSES IN DIVISIONS GROUPED ACCORDING TO REPORTER SEX

Division	Percentage of Responses: Male Number of Answers: 125	Percentage of Responses: Female Number of Answers: 508	Total M & F Number of Answers: 643
I. Intrapersonal	30%	42%	40%
II. Interpersonal	25	27	26
III. Transpersonal	45	31	34

DISCUSSION

The results of the study yield a picture of a group of adult readers whose lives are marked by rapid social and personal change and who assimilate the experience of transition, inner and outer, in part via the aesthetic transaction with fiction. The reports of the participants on fiction-reading are replete with reference to the central developmental tasks and themes of adult life. The following passage from the protocols underscores the findings:

> I seem to read more when I am engaged in a spurt of emotional growth, when the assumptions and attitudes about life which I use to order my perceptions are undergoing revision. Part of my process of synthesizing a new world view and a definition of my personal role is to become aware of the perceptions of others. I read to see how other people deal with the problem of existence... in order to better redefine my own role.

That so many of the men and women in the study referred to love and marital relationships in their discussion of fiction seems to be consonant with both a popular vision human preoccupations and of the nature of fiction. Similarly, the frequent indication of the concern of male respondents with beliefs and concepts is in harmony with a traditional conception of men as having a primary focus beyond self and relationship.

A striking outcome is the extent to which women's responses focused on matters of gender identity. That autonomy is a salient issue in the protocols of female respondents might have been anticipated from the recurrence of the theme in the work on women of psychologists and critics (Bardwick, 1979; Heilbrun, 1979; Miller, 1976).

The Mentoring Relationship and the Generactive Experience

A principal concern of the researcher was to trace existing parallels between the relationship of students to texts and authors, and the mentoring relationship. Levinson (1978) had emphasized the importance of mentoring relationships in adult development. To distinguish the mentoring aspects of fiction-reading from personal mentoring, a new construct is offered here. An essential element of the construct is the emphasis on the aesthetic transaction which is central to the relationship of reader and text. The researcher introduces the term generactive experience for the construct to suggest the generative and transactive aspects of the reader-text transaction that parallel mentoring. Generactive experience is here defined as that experience that derives from the aesthetic transaction with the text and that promotes growth and development.

That fiction-reading facilitates growth and development for this group of readers, that it has what is termed in this study a generactive aspect, seems borne out by reports in the protocols of the many moments of awareness or recognition about experience inspired by texts and authors. Responses tend to indicate that through the reader-text transaction, themes central to adult development are, in some measure, illuminated and significant insights gained.

For these readers, many deeply engaged with fiction at present, there was confidence in the intent of the author and in the essential authenticity of the text, in its aesthetic presentation of experience. Consider the following response:

> The experience of a "shared understanding" is precisely what I seek in reading fiction: finding in the clear, crafted prose of an admired writer the expression of--actually a confirmation of--my own dimly lit version of experience...The "shared experience" I'm writing of is what I felt, for instance, when I read Virginia Woolf's To the Lighthouse...The events of her life and the conditions of her mind enabled her to look into the perceptions that for me had always been ghost-guessed.

Such heightened appreciation of writers and texts seems to be the analogue of the attitude of the individual toward his mentor.

Levinson says that the intensity of the mentoring relationship generally has temporal limitations. Such limitations seem inherent to the reader-text relationship as well. More than half of the respondents reported that there are books, once very important to them, which no longer have the same relevance for them. Several described their experience explicitly in terms of the connection between the shift in their attitude toward the texts and their own development as adults.

The citing of same sex-authors by more than 80 percent of the male respondents, when they were asked to name an author important to them, recalls Levinson's finding (1978) that his male subjects almost invariably had same-sex mentors. Heilbrun

(1979) points out that male mentors have played a crucial role in the development of many successful women. Levinson (1978) indicates that women generally seem to have had less mentoring from either male or female mentors. That approximately two-thirds of the women did name a female author as important to them might suggest that these women have, at least recently, been attempting to compensate for an impoverishment in their lives of mentoring or mentoring by women in particular, by turning to literature for direction from women writers.

A student's response is revealing here:

> I am almost embarrassed to admit it, but I am drawn to works either by or about women in the same way I listen more keenly to female singers on the radio. Unconsciously I must be yearning for role models, for advice, for proof of what other women have done, for glimpses into their problems. There is always this hazy hope they will either reveal some path or secrets for me (i.e., teach me about life), or else they will express things I have subconsciously felt but never before seen in print...Maybe they will clarify something I didn't even realize I was feeling.

The intensity and eloquence with which women invested their reports on issues of gender identity signal the importance of these findings for a conception of the reader-text transaction as it relates to the contemporary women.

Throughout, there are clues to the nature of the generactive experience. As one student writes: "Reading fiction seems to be some sort of journey for me, with its own inherent purpose... Perhaps I read fiction in order to be."

LIMITATIONS

Certain circumstances created by the design of the study are identified as limitations of the investigation undertaken. The generalizability of the findings, for example, is limited by the intensive analysis of a sample of adults, predominantly white and middle class, who do not necessarily share in all the general characteristics of an adult readership. Further, participants' responses focused to an extent on particular works of literature which had been, or which were often similar to, those which had been shared in their reading experience as students at the adult education center.

Because the sample was not a stratified one in terms of either age or sex, there are limitations in the comparisions of results of the several age groups, as well as of male and female respondents. Finally, the linkage of fiction-reading with adult development cannot be fully explored because adult development research is as yet in process, particularly in the study of the women's life cycle.

FUTURE RESEARCH

The research begun in this study might be extended in various ways. First, the category system developed for this study might be further tested by researchers who could employ the taxonomy for their own investigations into reading and adult development. Researchers might expand, or in other ways modify, the present taxonomy for their use.

The construct, generactive experience, introduced in this study, might be given further definition through continued research. I might be of value to consider an exploration of the generactive, or growth facilitating, aspects of literature other than fiction, as well as the generactive aspects of the media: of television and film.

The avid readers in this study experienced fiction-reading as generactive. It would be interesting to know whether the experience of other groups of readers is coincident with that of the sample studied. Future studies could concern themselves with groups that differ in composition from the predominantly white, middle class, highly educated sample here.

As the research on adult development becomes more complete, particularly on women's life cycle, more investigation might be done on the response of readers at different stages in life. And since there did appear here to be significant differences in the reading response of men and women, further research on sex as a variable in the reader-text transaction could be undertaken.

IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHING

Since women readers here seemed to find the reading of women writers vital to an illumination of their conflicts of gender identity, more attention might be piad to the impact of including more women writers in curricula.

It is hoped that though the readers in this study were essentially self-motivated and valued being challenged aesthetically by texts, the insights gained from their responses might have relevance not only for readers in general but for those readers in particular who need encouragement and guidance to increase their literacy. That is, perhaps an awareness that avid readers value texts which provide them with generactive experience appropriate to their developmental needs as adults would ultimately help in the promotion of the reading habit.

The study will have served its purpose if it generates further such explorations into the nature of the transaction of reader and text and into the relationship of the aesthetic experience to the dynamically evolving lives of contemporary adults.

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